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**THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE**

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

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2 December 1983

MEMORANDUM FOR: Herbert E. Meyer  
Vice Chairman, National Intelligence Council

FROM : Major General Edward B. Atkeson, USA  
National Intelligence Officer for General Purpose Forces

SUBJECT : Measures of Effectiveness of the El Salvadorian War

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1. The fundamental question of how the war is progressing requires addressal at a number of levels. By its very nature, insurgency is probably most accurately measured by the very standard which is most difficult to gauge: the psychological dimension--how people think it is going, and who the people are holding the opinions. Government leaders will issue optimistic assessments up to the moment they board planes to escape the final battle, while people responding to interviews will often reply with what they think the questioner wants to hear in order to spare themselves either insurgent or rightwing death squad retribution. Nevertheless, there are gauges. Not infrequently during an insurgency the acuity of the threat is correlatable with the outflow of capital and refugees. Whatever the value of this level of analysis, other levels are often more manageable. I would group the others this way:

- Basic Resources of the Opposing Sides
- Intelligence and Counterintelligence
- Operational Vigor
- Results.

2. In the area of basic resources we want to know how many men each side can muster, how well qualified they are for their functions and how well armed and equipped they are. Are they getting help from abroad? Are the forces growing, holding their own or diminishing? How well do they measure up from a disciplinary point of view? Are they a credit to their cause, or do they create more enemies than they engage? How many desert? How many new members sign up? What are the trends in quality of leadership? training? experience? mobility?

3. In intelligence and counterintelligence we want to know which side is getting the best information from the people. Are the peasants and townspeople putting the finger on neighbors who support the insurgency or are they more readily notifying the guerrillas when a government patrol goes by?

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This is not a difficult area to measure. We can readily count, for example, instances of farmers or tavern keepers leading government forces to arms caches or warning them of ambushes. Often we can discern from interrogation of prisoners how much the insurgents depend upon informants among the people for operational intelligence. Comparisons over time will reveal trends. The most difficult part of this process, of course, is gathering the information from the field in an organized way. I am not sure that the El Salvadorian forces are geared to do it.

4. What about spies? Has the government been able to penetrate the opposition? How many insurgent sympathizers have been detected in the government's ranks? A rule of thumb says that one out of every 20 enlisted soldier is a spy. That puts about five in every company. The insurgents may have an agent among every 50 officers.

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6. Operational vigor and aggressiveness, of course, is enormously important. On the insurgent side we can get a sense for this by relatively simple counting of incidents and noting their complexity and geographic spread. Attacking a government outpost is more difficult than demolishing a power line tower or a small bridge. On the government side we need to know how much time the troops are out of garrison and what they are doing. Measurements of company- or battalion-days in the field on search operations indicate greater aggressiveness than do measures of equivalent time on most other activities. Numbers of ambushes at squad and platoon level, whether they are successful or not, at least provide insight into how field oriented the commanders are. Numbers of guerrillas killed and captured from these operations, of course, provide the additional indicator of competence of the small unit leadership.

7. Finally: results. The proof of the pie is in the eating. The problem here is to identify the best indicators peculiar to the situation. Much depends upon the nature of the problems which the two sides face. If, for example, arms or manpower are in short supply, then numbers of items captured or lost and numbers of casualties inflicted or sustained are most important. If, on the other hand, one side or the other can usually replace its losses, then rates of attrition become much more important than absolute numbers. The great danger in either case is the development of a "body count" mentality in which numbers are inflated by reporting units for morale and prestige purposes. Pressures for inflation of enemy losses and minimalizing ones own are practically inescapable in any war.

8. Also, by way of results, we can often count towns and districts substantially under the control of one side or the other. The best litmus I know in this area is the question, "where and when can a man in uniform walk or drive unarmed in safety?" My experience is that this will provide rough isobars of security which can be plotted and measured. Generally, urban areas

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will favor the government, while less populated areas will tend toward greater unsurgent influence, but the exercise can be instructive.

9. It should be borne in mind that no single indicator, or set of indicators, is very reliable. Too often outside factors will skew the statistics one way or another. Nevertheless, bookkeeping on the conflict is an important function to underpin both military operational and political policy decisions. The better the data we can get, the better our decisions should be. The attached list summarizes useful indicators.



Edward B. Atkeson

Attachment:  
As stated

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